Meet Me In the Woods
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Chapter 12: Bird Bath
Notes:
omg yall seen that for the future trailer???? i'm literally so excited for it raising the roof

Chapter Text
Raine looks back when all of the kids sitting at the table get up, Raine stepping out of the way so they can put their finished dinner plates in the sink. They're all pretty chatty with one another today, so they don't say much to Raine as they clean up. Hunter is the last one to put his plate in the sink, though, just standing there as all of his friends leave the room. He looks very worried, and once everyone else leaves he very quietly asks Raine, "Can you go get Mr. Clawthorne?"

Raine nods, "Mhm, yeah, I'll be right back."

Hunter just nods and goes back over to sit at the table, Raine leaving the room and heading towards the tower. They walk in to see a lot of the Coven Heads gathered around their makeshift kitchenette, probably eating dinner. They don't even bat an eye at Raine as they walk by and go up the stairs to Dell's room, which isn't that high up the tower. They knock on the door, which opens a second later, Gwendolyn standing on the other side.

"Oh, hello Raine dear!" She warmly greets, "What brings you over here? Do you need something?"

"Yeah, uh, is Dell in there? Hunter wants him to check on Flapjack," Raine explains, Gwendolyn stepping back and revealing Dell getting up from the bed.

"Flapjack needs something?" He asks, Raine nodding.

"Yeah, Hunter said he feels like something is wrong with him but he doesn't know what, so I figured I'd come get you to check," Raine explains, Dell nodding.

"Mhm, I'd be glad to come check on him," Dell easily agrees, Raine smiling before going back down the stairs and into the house, followed by Dell. Raine enters the kitchen to see Hunter with his head on the table, petting Flapjack who is doing nothing but just sitting there quietly. Hunter sits right up when they walk in, Raine smiling at him. It doesn't ease any nerves, though, Hunter looking just as worried as Dell walks over and takes a seat in front of him, Raine walking around the table to sit next to Hunter, giving him a little bit of space. Dell smiles at Hunter, "So, what's been up with Flapjack since I saw him the other day, how has he been?"

"He's, uh, he's been ok but today he's been really quiet and sluggish," Hunter explains, "I- I don't know, maybe he's just tired but I feel a lot like there's something wrong."

“Mhm, ok, you’re bonded to him so you’re going to be the best person to know when something is wrong, it’s important to trust yourself on that,” Dell tells him, patting the table in front of him, “But come here, Flapjack, let me check up on you.”

Flapjack stands up and hops over to Dell, jumping into his hand when he offers it. Dell starts with unwrapping his bandages, being very gentle despite his shaking hands. Flapjack doesn’t let out a peep the whole time, Dell just setting down the bandage when he’s done.

“Don’t move that wing, please, Flapjack,” Dell requests as he holds him up and looks at his wing closely, furrowing his brow at it. He tries to draw a finger across the spot where the wing joins to his body, Flapjack tweeting uncomfortably. Dell pulls his hand back, “I’m sorry, buddy, I’m just trying to look at this.”

“Is he ok?” Hunter asks, almost frantic.

“Hold on a second, kid, I’m getting a look at him,” Dell assures him as he studies Flapjack, Hunter looking over at Raine. Raine moves a bit closer and rubs Hunter’s arm, giving him a warm, calm smile to try to assure him that everything is going to be ok. He doesn’t return it, though, just looking back at Dell. Flapjack tweets painfully again, Hunter jumping to his defense.

“You’re hurting him,” He accuses.

“I know, I’m sorry, I’m just trying to see what’s going on with his wing,” Dell explains, looking back at Flapjack, “I need to lift it up but I don’t want to hurt you, hm.”

“Do you want me to get Camila?” Raine offers, Dell looking up.

“Oh, that would be great, yes please,” He agrees, Raine patting Hunter’s shoulder before getting up and going upstairs, heading down the hall to Camila’s room. The door is cracked open but Raine knocks anyway before pushing it open, seeing Camila sitting on her bed, a book in her lap, looking up at Raine.

“Hey, uh, sorry to bother you but Dell is looking at Flapjack and needs your help to look at his wing, I think,” Raine tells her, “Do you mind coming to help?”

“Of course,” She smiles, putting down her book and following Raine down the hallway and downstairs, Raine hearing Dell talking in the kitchen. It stops when they walk in, though, Raine seeing how nervous Hunter looks and guessing Dell was trying to calm him down a bit. Raine returns to sit next to Hunter again, Camila sitting down next to Dell. Hunter moves closer to Raine so they’re sitting right next to each other, Raine wrapping an arm around him and rubbing his shoulder, trying to calm him down a bit. Camila holds her hands out, Dell letting Flapjack hop into them as he explains to her.

“So, I think that something is irritating Flapjack’s new wing and I just want to see how it moves because the connection point is hurting him but I can’t tell if it’s a new wound or the wing rejecting,” He tells her, “So can you just very delicately life up the wing to perpendicular

to his body? It should hurt him a bit but it shouldn't be any kind of sharp pain, so if it is we'll stop, Flapjack."

Flapjack nods, Camila putting Flapjack in one hand and slowly and gently lifting up his wing. She only gets it up a little bit before Flapjack tweets scarily loud, Raine feeling Hunter tense up and move to lean into them. Camila immediately lets go of the wing and moves her other hand to keep Flapjack from hopping out of her hand on instinct.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I stopped," She apologizes to the bird, beginning to pet him on the head. She looks over at Dell, who looks a little dissatisfied with how that turned out.

"That's weird, I just looked at him a couple of days ago and everything seemed like it was healing just fine, he didn't seem in pain or anything. Now we can't even touch the wing without him hurting, he seems to have gone backward."

"Did he go under any kind of intense stress? I know that can stall healing to animals in the Human Realm," Camila asks, looking over at Hunter, who shakes his head.

"No, he's just been with me, he hasn't even done anything," Hunter nervously answers.

"I didn't want to bring it up, but I heard that something happened with you last night, right?" Dell asks, Hunter nodding.

"Yeah, I uh, I woke up and couldn't breathe," Hunter answers, "I just think I overexerted myself yesterday, Flapjack wasn't even really there for a lot of the stuff I was doing."

"Mmm, I think I know what's wrong," Dell looks at Camila, summoning some bandages and handing them to her, "Can you do me a favor and rewrap his wing? Just like it was before, with the other one free."

"Mhm, yeah, of course," She affirms, beginning to rewrap it with the wing again.

Dell looks back over at Hunter, "So, there's this rare occurrence with palismen that only happens with very strong and trusting palismen bonds where the palisman lends their magic to their partner to help them recover from any kind of injury or magical strain faster. I've seen it once or twice and I read up on it after you and him came in last week because I thought that's what happened to you then and I was right, but normally it doesn't last more than one instance, once the witch is healed the palisman doesn't need to share their magic anymore. However, here, I'm guessing that Flapjack is still imbuing you with his magic to help you recover better, so when you pushed yourself yesterday you felt ok because your magic had been drained but Flapjack was lending you his to keep you feeling good."

Hunter wordlessly nods, his eyebrows knitted with worry.

"It's not severe and it's not forever, once Flapjack is better he probably will stop doing it to this degree, but because he's still using a lot of magic to heal that transfer is more vulnerable," Dell details, "So, instead of putting the effort to taking his wing, he's putting it to making you feel ok."

“So I hurt him?” Hunter asks, his voice very small.

“Not directly, it isn’t your fault, you didn’t know this would happen,” Dell assures him, “I think the best thing for him right now will be the palisman form of a replenishing potion, I know we have enough stuff stocked away for it, the Bat Queen was very generous with the ingredients she gave us. We’ll just pour it on the spot where his wing joins to his body and it’ll give his body a little boost and help get him back on track with his healing. It’s also really important, though, that you take it easy. You need to be careful with how much activity you’re doing, you can’t push yourself at all until we’re sure Flapjack’s wing is completely healed, ok kid?”

Hunter nods, although he doesn’t say anything. Dell, thankfully, doesn’t press the topic.

“But regardless, let’s start with the potion for him. Where’s Edalyn? She knows how to brew this, and, well, I’m definitely not up to brewing anymore,” He comments, looking at Raine for an answer.

“Uh, well, she’s upstairs in her room,” Raine replies, feeling how tense Hunter is and deciding to put up the facade that they’re going to be able to get Eda down here to brew, “I’ll go grab her.”

“Mhm, ok, thank you,” Dell smiles, Raine returning it before getting up from the table, rubbing Hunter’s shoulder before heading out of the kitchen and upstairs. They stand outside of Eda’s room and brace themselves for the inevitable grumpy, in-pain Eda they’re going to have to convince to brew something for Flapjack after the day she’s had. They feel really bad about it but there’s no way out of it now.

They open the door slowly, seeing Eda asleep in bed, Raine just walking in and leaving the door open, not thinking twice about it with their goal in mind. They walk over to her in bed, shaking her to try and wake her up.

“Eda, Eda,” They shake her a bit harder, “Hey Eda, you need to get up.”

“Mmm, what?” She whines, “What do you want?”

“Your dad needs you to brew something, Flapjack needs it,” Raine tells her, Eda rolling on her back and squinting up at them, confused.

“What?” She groggily asks, “What do you mean for Flapjack?”

“He needs a potion for his wing, you need to brew it,” Raine tells her, Eda groaning.

“Raine, I have one hand, I can’t brew,” She counters, “Get someone else to do it.”

“Who?” Raine questions, “We don’t have anyone else who can brew this, your dad asked me to get you .”

“I can’t do that today, can it wait?” She rubs her head with her hand.

“I mean, I don’t think it can wait,” Raine tells her, “Come on, please, after it’s over we’ll go to bed, ok?”

“No, no, I can’t do that,” She shakes her head, “I’ll do it tomorrow morning but I’m not-”

She’s cut off by a creak of a board in the hallway, Eda sitting up and Raine looking over to see Hunter standing just in the doorway, Flapjack in his hands and clear tears in his eyes. Raine looks back at Eda, seeing her face sadden when she sees him.

“Ok, yeah, I’m coming,” Eda concedes, swinging her legs over the side of the bed and sitting there a second before pushing herself up with a groan, Raine stepping out of the way as she walks over to Hunter, ruffling his hair. “Come on, let’s patch him up,” She encourages him, her voice clearly tired. Hunter nods and walks out of the room, Eda and Raine both following after him, Eda before she goes down the stairs.

Raine looks at her confused, “Everything ok?”

“Mhm, yeah, I just need to grab someone to help me out,” She points back behind her towards the kids’ rooms, “Can you take out my caldron and just put it on the counter, please?”

“I’ll go take it out, don’t worry,” They assure her, Eda giving them a weak smile before walking off, Raine going downstairs into the kitchen, surprised to not see Dell. Hunter is just standing, almost idle in the middle of the room, Raine asking him, “Where’s Dell? Do you know?”

“I came to tell you, he went to grab a book for Eda to brew with, he said he’ll be back in a minute,” Hunter weakly answers, Raine nodding.

“Mhm, ok,” Raine affirms, noticing how Hunter really seems like he needs a minute to process everything, so they offer, “Why don’t you go sit in the living room? I’ll come sit with you after I set out Eda’s stuff, ok?”

Hunter nods, walking out of the room and into the living room. Camila, who is sitting at the table looking back at them, says, “I hope Flapjack is ok.”

“He should be, I trust Dell,” Raine affirms as they go into one of Eda’s cabinets and pull out her cauldron.

“Mhm, yeah, he knows what he’s doing,” She gets up, “I’ll get out of the way, though, just come get me if you need any help.”

“Thank you,” Raine smiles at her, Camila walking out of the kitchen. Raine just takes a deep breath at the less-than-ideal turn their evening took. It’ll be ok, they remind themself. Everything is going to be ok.

They just feel bad that Eda needed to get involved to make that happen.

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Eda stands outside of Luz and Amity's door for a second, taking a deep breath before composing herself enough to knock. It takes a minute but Amity opens the door, looking at Eda confused and almost mad.

"What do you want?" She questions a little aggressively. Even though Eda is functioning at about half capacity right now, she knows that Luz probably told her about the conversation they had this morning. That's Eda's fault, so she brushes off the aggression for now.

"Is Luz in here?" She asks, Amity stepping out of the way to let Eda look into the room, seeing Luz sitting on her bed. Eda gives her as much of a smile as she can muster, "Hey, I need your help with something."

"Why do you need my help?" Luz quips back, "You've got it on your own."

"Kid," Eda sighs, "My dad needs me to brew something for Flapjack, I need you to help me out. I won't take up too much of your time, I promise."

"Why do you need me?" Luz asks, "Can't you get someone else?"

"You know what you're doing better than anyone else in this house," Eda tells her, "No one else can tolerate me brewing other than you."

"But why do you need the help? What do you want me to do?"

"Stir the cauldron, that's it."

"I hate stirring."

"I know but I can't do two things at once."

"Well why not?"

Eda huffs, knowing exactly what Luz is trying to get out of her and deciding it's better to just do it now. "I'm sorry for brushing you off this morning, and I promise we can talk about it if you come help me."

Luz stares at her and contemplates it for a minute before setting aside whatever is in her lap and getting up. "Fine, but if you brush me off again I'm leaving you to figure out how to stir on your own."

“It’s a deal, come on,” Eda beckons her, Luz walks over to her, looking up at Eda skeptically, but Eda just ruffles her hair, “Don’t give me that look, we’re gonna talk about it.”

“I don’t trust you,” Luz calls back, although it’s a bit playful. Eda just smiles and looks back at Amity, who clearly is not happy with Eda.

“I’ll bring her back in one piece, bossy boots, don’t give me that look,” Eda points at her, Amity furrowing her brow at her.

“You better,” She threatens, Eda just laughing before shutting the door, heading downstairs and into the kitchen. She is definitely not in the state to do this in the slightest, she’s so tired and she feels like her body is on fire. But she saw Hunter’s face when he walked in, if she doesn’t do this that kid is going to panic. She doesn’t even know what she’s making, so she’s thankful when she gets into the kitchen and her dad is standing at the table with Luz, looking up when she comes in.

“Hello witchlet, you look worse for wear,” He comments, Eda dryly laughing.

“I feel it, now what am making Flapjack?” She asks, walking over to where he has a book out on the table. It’s open to a palisman replenishing potion, Eda remarking, “Oh, I can do that with my eyes closed, that’s easy.”

“I figured, but it’s always safer to have a book on hand,” He tells her, Eda humming.

“Alright, whatever you say, Dad, I won’t even touch the thing,” She brags as she goes over to get out the bag of palistrom wood ingredients, her dad laughing.

“That confidence is going to hurt you one day, Edalyn,” He jokingly scolds.

“Well I’ll let you know when the day comes,” She says as she picks up the bag, carrying it over next to the table but knowing she’s not going to be able to pick it up to actually get on the table. She decides gathering stuff will be Luz’s job, looking at her and saying, “Can you put that on the table for me, kid? And there’s a couple more things we need to grab, too.”

Her dad steps towards the door, telling Eda, “Alright, I have dinner waiting for me and your mom is going to hunt me down if I don’t go back and finish it, just come get me when you’re done and I’ll put it on Flapjack, ok?”

“Sounds good to me, thanks, Dad,” She smiles at him, her dad returning it before heading back to the tower, Eda looking back to Luz, who is already grabbing everything on the list in the book and all Eda’s brewing tools. “You’re still sharp, aren’t you?” Eda teases, smiling at her fondly, “Grab me the jar of snabbit claws too, it’s not on here but I’m adding it.”

“You’re going off the recipe?” Luz asks as she sets the stirrer and chopping knife on the table, “Is that smart?”

“I know what I’m doing,” Eda waves her off, “You know how many times I’ve made this potion? I’ve been brewing this since for longer than you’ve been alive, kid, I could do it with my eyes closed.”

“What is it?” Luz questions as she goes over to retrieve the last few ingredients, Eda walking around the table and pushing the bench in so she can stand right up to the table as she answers.

“It’s just a replenishing potion like a witch would get but for a palisman, it’s meant to lend them some extra magic if their body is running low. You use them a lot on palismen with injuries after a lot of use because they’re tired, I don’t know why we’re making one for Flapjack right now. My dad wants it, carvers’ orders I guess.”

“Hunter has been saying something is wrong with Flapjack all day, maybe he’s not healing right or something,” Luz shrugs, setting the ingredients on the table and doing the thing she always does where she sorts them by how they’re ordered in the book. In the meantime, Eda looks around for paper or something to make a water glyph to fill the cauldron and one to put a fire under it, but she can’t find anything to write on. Luz looks up at her from where she’s sorting, asking, “What are you looking for?”

“Something for glyphs, I need to fill this up and put a fire under it,” Eda tells her, Luz pulling out a small stack of square, yellow papers, seemingly held together by nothing. Eda looks at it confused, “Where did you get those from?”

“These?” Luz holds up her stack of paper with one hand, the other digging in her pocket. Eda nods, Luz pulling out a pencil and putting the papers on the table to write what Eda needs while explaining, “They’re sticky notes, they’re a human thing. They’re little papers stuck together with like an adhesive at the top on the back so you can pull them apart and stick them anywhere. They’re the perfect size for glyphs, see?”

Luz hands over the water glyph, Eda pinching the top of the paper to feel how sticky it is on the back. Of course, now it’s stuck to her finger, Eda holding her hand out, “Now it’s stuck, get it off.”

“It’s not that strong,” Luz counters, pulling the paper off easily, before handing it back so Eda can grab the bottom instead, “Just put it in the cauldron, it’s just paper.”

“Mmm, weird paper,” Eda idly comments as she drops the paper in the cauldron and taps it, taking her hand out as the cauldron fills up halfway. Luz hands her a second one for the fire, Eda setting it under the cauldron and tapping that too, starting the small fire she needs under the cauldron to heat it up. She leans against the table with her hand, watching as Luz finishes lining everything up.

“Sooo,” Luz stretches out, Eda knowing what’s coming next, “How was your day?”

“Not good, how was yours?” Eda asks, knowing no matter what she says Luz is going to press anyway.

“Why was yours not good? What happened?” Luz asks.

“It’s just been a hard day, I have bad days sometimes, you know that. The Owl Beast has just been mad at me so I’ve been hurting today, it is what it is,” Eda honestly answers, “I’ve just been doing what I can, which is really just laying in bed.”

“But what about your hand? Why is that off?” Luz points at Eda’s stump hanging uselessly by her side.

“I strained it yesterday carrying stuff back from town,” Eda shrugs, “It had been getting shaky and painful to use, Alador just took it off to work on it. I have no idea when I’m getting it back, so I’m one-handed until he’s done.”

“Why won’t you let anyone help you, though?”

Eda sighs, shaking her head, “I don’t know, kid, it’s just hard to ask for help. You know that, I know you do.”

“But I’m not in constant pain and missing a hand,” Luz argues, “That’s totally different.”

“Eh, not that different,” Eda dismisses, “It’s just been a very long couple of days, it’ll pass and I’ll be fine.”

“That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t talk about it.”

“Hey, what’s your saying? pot calling the, uh, the keckle? kebbles?”

“Kettle,” Luz chuckles, “Pot calling the kettle black, yeah, ok, maybe it is. But you’re in actual, physical pain Eda, that’s way worse.”

“It’s not, trust me, I’ve done both,” Eda counters, “They both mess with you, that’s pretty equal to me.”

“Alright, whatever, I’m done talking about this,” Luz concedes, Eda humming.

“Mhm, alright, whatever you say, kid,” Eda easily lets it go, not wanting to press too much and cause Luz to just shut down on her. She’s enjoying actually talking to her today, and she really isn’t in the mood to have that serious of a conversation anyway. Instead, she looks back at the now bubbling water, dipping her finger in it and feeling it’s definitely hot enough to start brewing. Luz looks at her disgusted, though, Eda furrowing her brow at her, “What? I’m seeing if it’s ready.”

“You dipped your finger in it, that’s gross! And dangerous!” Luz points out, “Where’s your little screaming hot plate?”

“Never ended up getting back here, I don’t know. When I stole all our stuff back some things had just vanished, who knows where it is,” Eda shrugs, “Testing water with your finger is way more traditional, anyway. Really connects you with your craft.”

“It’s gross, what if you, I don’t know, contaminate it or something?” Luz questions, hopping up to sit on the table crisscrossed in front of the cauldron, Eda laughing.

“You’re one to talk about gross, we eat up here and you’re sitting all over it,” Eda teases, Luz’s bright laugh filling the room.

“Hey, I shower every day ,” Luz playfully argues, “Plus you’re going to put snabbit’s claws on this table, that’s way grosser, those smell disgusting and they get everywhere .”

“Those are considered a delicacy in some parts of the Isles, you know that?” Eda tells her as she starts to portion out ingredients and add them to the pot. Once she gets the basic, ‘simple’ ingredients in there, she points at the stirrer on the table, “Alright, kid, your favorite part, get cracking.”

“Ugh, come on,” Luz groans, “Already? You put in like, two things!”

“Palisman potions need a lot of stirring, I put in the simple stuff, everything else needs to be put in slowly, come on,” Eda encourages her, “The faster you start, the faster you’re done.”

“Ok, ok, fine,” Luz moves to kneel in front of the cauldron instead, picking up the stirring stick and starting to mix the potion, Eda watching for it to turn brown before she starts adding in other things. In the meantime, though, she figures she and Luz might as well chat.

“So, what did you do today?” Eda asks, “You guys were pretty quiet up there.”

“Oh, we worked on this puzzle of the Coliseum Gus found, we almost finished it, actually,” Luz tells her, “It was 1,000 pieces, too, so it’s impressive we nearly finished it in a day. Hunter and Gus were crazy about it, they worked nonstop all day. Amity and I helped a bit, but we were mostly just there. Willow just stared at Hunter the whole time, I think.”

Eda chuckles, “They’re turning into you and Amity.”

“We’re strong influences, I guess. It’s contagious,” Luz jokes, “But did you do anything today? I know you weren’t in bed all day.”

“No, not really,” Eda shakes her head, really wanting to have a back-and-forth conversation with Luz but knowing that her little amount of focus really needs to go to making this potion right, “Why don’t you talk to me, kid? I’m exhausted, I’ll listen but I’m not up to talking a ton tonight.”

“Oh, I mean, I don’t have anything to talk about,” Luz answers, a bit sad.

“Why don’t you tell me about yesterday? I heard you guys outside playing something, what was it?” Eda asks, Luz brightening back up. She starts to explain to Eda all about how they brought the human game they were playing in the hallway yesterday outside and how Hooty began playing with them too. It’s very relieving that Eda doesn’t have to do anything more than just hum to affirm she heard Luz, letting her just go on and on and on with whatever

comes to her next. She knows Luz could talk forever if she were allowed, so Eda doesn't feel too bad about asking her to just talk to Eda. She still does feel bad about it, but Eda is just really tired. Every inch of her body is screaming at her to just curl back up in bed and forget about everything she should be doing, but that'll just have to wait. Flapjack needs this right now, and she promised Hunter she'd keep him and his bird safe and healthy. That doesn't take a day off, even when she really needs one.

Eventually, everything gets into the potion, Luz falling quiet as she works to stir the now much thicker, green liquid until it thins out again. Eda just watches it closely, stopping Luz after about five minutes of stirring.

"Pick up the stick," Eda requests, Luz picking it up and shaking her head at how the potion sticks to it and puts up too much resistance pulling the stick out.

"No, it's too thick," Luz tells her, continuing to stir.

Eda beams at her, lightly hitting her on the shoulder, "Look at you, potions master, you know what you're doing."

"Well, brewing with you for months had to teach me something ," Luz retorts, although she's smiling too.

"I was worried you'd lost some of it but I should've known better," Eda comments, "You're still sharp as ever, kid, you could've done this without me."

"You wish," Luz picks up the stirrer again, shaking her head silently before continuing to push around the potion. Eda looks up when Raine appears in the doorway, looking mildly worried.

"Hey, uh, when will that be done?" Raine asks, Luz also looking at Eda for an answer. Eda takes the stirring stick from Luz and pushes it around a bit, shrugging and telling Raine.

"Like two more minutes?" She guesses, Raine nodding.

"Ok, can I go get your dad?" They question, Eda nodding.

"Mhm, yeah, it'll be done by the time he gets in here," Eda affirms, Raine nodding and walking down the hallway. Eda finishes up the stirring, Luz climbing down off the table and pointing at all the opened bottles of ingredients and stuff set out on the table.

"Do you want me to clean this up?" Luz asks.

"That would be great, kid, thank you," Eda smiles at her, Luz starting to put everything back where it goes. As she works, Eda finishes up the potion, continuing to push it around until her dad appears in the doorway, walking over to where she's stirring.

"All done?" He asks, Eda humming.

"Mhm," She steps out of the way and lets him look into it, nodding.

“This looks good, how much extra did you end up adding to it?” He asks, Eda chuckling.

“Just snabbit’s claw, nothing else,” Eda answers, “I promise that’s all I put in there, just to make it absorb a little faster.”

“Alright, good,” He smiles, looking up when Raine comes into the room, Hunter behind them with Flapjack in his hands. Eda’s dad beckons them over, “Come in and sit,” He looks over at Eda, “I’m thinking about maybe soaking Flapjack in it instead, I was contemplating it with your mom and she said it might be more effective.”

“Dad, I don’t know what’s wrong with him, you never told me,” Eda reminds him.

“Oh, well, that’s not helpful is it?” He laughs, “I’ll spare you the details, then, let’s just soak him in the potion, it can’t hurt. Do you have the tub I gave you for Owlbert?”

“No, that thing is probably lost somewhere in the precinct,” Eda replies, leaning against the table, “We might have some pot that does the trick, though.”

“What are you doing?” Luz asks, looking between the two of them from where she’s standing beside the end of the bench on the other side where Hunter is sitting.

“So, slight change of plan, I think we’re going to have Flapjack soak in the potion instead of just applying it on him. It’ll be much more effective and with the snabbit’s claw it should work a decent amount faster too,” Her dad explains, “Can you two do me a favor and try to find a good pot for Flapjack to soak in? It should be tall enough for him to sit in with the potion up to his neck but not too tall that he’s lost in it, ok? You can leave Flapjack on the table, I’ll take his bandages off in a second.”

“Mhm, we got it,” Luz nods, Hunter setting Flapjack on the table and looking over at Raine.

“I’ll keep an eye on him,” Raine assures him, Hunter nodding and letting Luz pull him up and over to where Eda’s pots are in her cabinet. Her dad beckons Flapjack over and starts to unwrap his bandages as Eda walks around to take a seat next to Raine, who wraps an arm around her waist. She immediately puts almost her full weight on them, so happy to be sitting and not supporting her body on her own anymore. They rub her side with their hand, whispering to her, “Are you doing ok?”

“Hanging in there,” She replies, sighing, “Barely.”

“We’re almost done,” They whisper, Eda nodding and resting her head on their shoulder. They hold her up well, she muses, appreciative that she gets a second to relax. She was right earlier, she was not ready for this, but she didn’t have any choice. It doesn’t make it any easier on her, though.

The kids come back over a second later with two different options, one is a shorter pot probably tall enough to submerge Flapjack standing, although the sides might be a little tall, and the other is a pie dish that’s definitely a little low for him standing up. Luz sets the both

on the table, Hunter returning to sit down where he was before. Eda's dad looks up from where he finished unwrapping Flapjack.

"Oh, this will work very well," He pulls the pie dish closer, looking between Flapjack and the dish, "Mmm, he's a little tall, but I'd rather something open so he doesn't feel trapped. Witchlet, do you mind filling this for me?"

Eda looks over at Luz, "Do you mind doing that, kid? I don't have the hands to hold the dish and move the potion. Just use the ladle hanging on the wall behind us."

"Oh, yeah, I got it," Luz nods, going back and grabbing the ladle. Her dad looks at her a bit skeptically, clearly not sure about Luz's ability to do this right.

"I trained her, Dad, she knows what she's doing," She assures him, her dad just smiling and moving over.

"I trust anyone you trust, witchlet," He replies, Luz walking up beside him and picking up the pie dish, staring at it a second before going into her pocket and pulling out a piece of paper. Eda just smiles proudly as Luz writes up one of her glyphs and moves the dish, putting down her paper and making a perfect block of ice to the perfect height for the pie dish. She puts it on top and moves the green potion into the pie dish with the ladle, and once she's done she moves the pie dish before pulling out two more pieces of paper, writing some glyph combo on both of them before pressing them to the ice block, which melts and turns into a thin mist that dissipates quick.

"Hey, that one worked," She smiles, looking up at Eda, "I've been working on finding a good way to melt ice glyphs and I didn't think that combo would work. I came up with it in the Human Realm so there was really no opportunity to test it, I'm just glad it didn't blow up."

Eda chuckles, "You never fail to make your old Owl Lady proud, kid."

Luz smiles even wider, Eda's dad laughing in what seems like a bit of shock.

"That's how you do magic?" He asks, Luz looking over and nodding.

"Yeah, glyphs," She affirms, her dad rubbing Luz's shoulder.

"You're one impressive kid, Luz, that was the coolest thing I've seen in a while," He praises, Luz shrugging.

"Eh, that was pretty lame, I can do way better," She brags, Eda's dad laughing again.

"And I can tell Edalyn trained you, too," He jokes, "Thank you for your help, Luz, I appreciate it."

"Yeah, of course," She smiles, going back around the table to pull up the stool at the end of the table next to Hunter and sit down. Eda's dad pulls out the bench and sits down himself, scratching Flapjack on the head.

“Ok, Flapjack, we’re gonna soak you in the potion to make you feel a bit better, ok?”

Flapjack hops backward a couple of times before turning around and hopping right over to Hunter, cuddling up to where he’s leaning against the table and chirping at him. The bird sounds distinctly quiet and weak, nothing like he normally sounds. Hunter reaches down and pets him, telling his bird, “I’m sorry Flap, you need it, come on. It’s gonna help you.”

Flapjack tweets again, Hunter sighing.

“Come on, buddy, please, it’s gonna help you,” Hunter begs, audibly getting upset. Eda’s dad steps in, though.

“Bird palismen never like the soaks, it never goes well,” He says, patting the table, “Flapjack, you have to do this, there’s no other option. The faster you get in, the faster you get out, come here.” Flapjack looks up at Hunter before hopping forward over to Eda’s dad, who picks up the bird from either side and holds him up, telling him, “Ok, I’m gonna put you in, you can’t move the wing, ok? Keep it still, and it needs to soak in the potion too.”

Flapjack nods, Eda’s dad smiling and setting him down into the pie dish. Flapjack kicks his feet at first but once he’s in it he settles in and sits in the liquid so it’s up to his neck, his wing completely underwater.

Eda’s dad looks up to the left of him at the clock on the wall, telling everyone, “Alright, he’ll sit in that for about 10 minutes with the snabbit’s foot and then he should be all set. Maybe we’ll do another one tomorrow because we have the potion to do it, but that’ll be it for tonight, we don’t want to go overboard.”

All of them hum in affirmation, the table going quiet as they watch Flapjack sit submerged in the potion, looking at Hunter very disgruntled. Hunter just puts his head down on the table, resting his chin on his hands to watch Flapjack. Luz moves so she’s sitting side by side with him, putting an arm around his shoulders. Hunter leans into it surprisingly, Eda smiling at how unexpectedly close they’ve gotten. She figured with Amity, Willow, and Gus around, Luz would be so wrapped up in them that Hunter got a bit of the short end of the stick, but apparently it’s not like that at all. Luz has just got that effect on people, apparently.

They stay sitting there for the next 10 minutes in complete silence, Eda starting to drift off on Raine’s shoulder. She’s trying her best to stay awake, though, sitting up after she almost falls asleep a few times. Raine looks over at her confused, Eda just giving them a small, tired smile to try and dismiss them, and although they look away Eda can tell they’re definitely not convinced. by it. Eda just keeps her eyes trained on the bird, who is slowly soaking up the potion that’s turning from green to clear.

Eda’s dad breaks the silence when Flapjack’s 10 minutes are up, him petting Flapjack on top of the head and telling him, “Ok Flapjack, you’re all set buddy, let’s take you out.”

Flapjack stands back up, Eda's dad taking him out and placing him on the table, where Flapjack then shakes himself off, getting the potion he was in everywhere. Eda hears Luz and Hunter both laugh, Flapjack hopping over to them and tweeting at Hunter disgruntled.

"I'm sorry you're wet, buddy. It's done, you're all done," Hunter tells him, Eda hearing how much less tense Hunter sounds. Raine lets out a quiet sigh of relief, Eda less so hearing it and more feeling the wave of calming magic they let out over the table.

Her dad chuckles, "Come here, Flapjack, let me bandage you up and then Hunter can take you." Flapjack hops back over, letting Eda's dad summon bandages and start to wrap him up, saying, "Edalyn, this can just stay out here covered for him tomorrow morning, it doesn't need to stay warm."

"Mhm," Eda hums, tired at the thought of having to cover and clean up. She secretly hopes someone will take pity on how horrible she feels and do it for her because she really doesn't want to do it.

Her dad finishes wrapping Flapjack quickly, Flapjack immediately hopping over to Hunter, twittering demandingly. Hunter picks him up and laughs, telling him, "You're all done, buddy, stop complaining, we're helping you."

Eda's dad laughs before standing up, telling Hunter, "I'll come find you tomorrow sometime in the morning so we can give him the second soak, but he should be back to his normal self by tomorrow night."

"Thank you, Mr. Clawthorne," Hunter replies, her dad smiling.

"Call me Dell, kid, and of course, I'm glad I could help," He answers, "Feel free to come get me if you need anything at all, I can always check something out with Flapjack if you need it. Or if you'd just like to visit, I'm always free."

"Mhm, thank you," Hunter repeats, her dad stepping back.

"Are you alright cleaning up, witchlet?" He asks, "I'm worried your mom is going to come in here and ask a million questions."

Eda chuckles, "I got it, don't worry about it."

"Good," He smiles, walking off and waving, "Have a good night, guys get me if you need anything."

"We will, good night, Dad," Eda answers as her dad walks back out of the room, heading back to the tower.

Raine immediately shakes her a bit, telling her, "Go upstairs, I'll clean up."

"No, no, I got it," She dismisses them, swinging her legs over the bench and bracing herself to get up, but Raine gets up first.

“No, I got it, go upstairs,” They state, not leaving a lot of room for argument. Not that Eda really wants to, though, so she just nods and takes the hand they offer to help her stand up. They smile at her, whispering, “Thank you for helping.”

“Mhm, now don’t bother me until at least 9 tomorrow,” She replies, smiling.

Raine chuckles, “No promises.”

Eda just playfully nudges them before heading back upstairs, very embarrassed by how long it takes her to get up the stairs in her own house. By the time she gets to the top, she can practically taste the comfort of her bed, but of course that has to be interrupted by one of the kids’ doors opening, Amity stepping out of her room.

“Luz is fine, we talked, everything is good,” Eda assures her before she can even ask.

“And Flapjack?” Amity asks

“Flapjack is fine too,” Eda tells her, “He just needed a little magic bath.”

“Ok, thank you, Eda,” Amity answers, smiling before going back into her room. Eda heads into hers, practically collapsing onto the bed facedown. She almost just stays there, but she knows she’ll be much more comfortable bundled up in blankets. So she pushes herself up and climbs under the covers, curling up into the most comfortable position she can and finally letting out a sigh of relief as the constant, flaring pain becomes a hum in the background instead of screaming at her. She doesn’t even have the energy to think about what just happened, just happy that Flapjack is ok and she’s done doing things for today. She doesn’t stop herself as she drifts off to sleep, hoping at some point soon Raine comes up here with her. Not that she needs them or anything, it would just be nice.

Titan, she’s getting soft, isn’t she?

***

Willow ties off the end of her hair, finishing off her second braid. She and Gus have been getting ready for bed mostly in silence, so Willow is surprised when Gus speaks up.

“Willow,” He starts, Willow looking over at him on his bed in the adjacent corner of the room. “Are you also worried about Hunter?”

Willow, who has been thinking about this all day, takes Gus up on his offer to talk about her worry with Hunter, walking over and sitting down in front of him before answering, a bit quieter so Hunter doesn’t hear them talking about him if he walks in. “I’ve been thinking about it all day, what if something happens again tonight? I mean, Hunter told me that Eda

and Raine think it's just a one-off thing but we don't know what happened, what do we do if something worse happens this time? And what if we don't do the right thing again and he gets even more hurt?"

"I don't know, I don't want to be mean but I've been thinking it might be better for him if he stayed with Eda and Raine again. I mean, nothing happened the two nights he was there, right?"

"I don't know if that was causation, but I guess I understand," She nods, "I've been really worried about it since we got back, it's just been nonstop bugging me, why don't we know what's wrong with him?"

"I wish we did," Gus sighs, "That was really scary last night, I don't want that to happen again."

"If it does, we can deal with it," She tries to reassure him, although she's shaky on that fact herself. Gus doesn't seem to be comforted, though, pulling his knees up to his chest and resting his head on them. They both go quiet, Willow just watching as Gus toys with the bottoms of his pajama pants, unsure if he's going to say anything or not. Her question is answered a minute later when Gus just suddenly blurts out.

"I'm scared," He tells her, looking up at Willow. She's a bit surprised at first, but she jumps to comfort him the best she can.

"I'm worried about Hunter too, but I'm sure it'll be ok-"

"No, no, I'm scared about everything ," Gus corrects her, "I get it, you know, during the day we pretend everything is ok because it's easier like that but when do we get to freak out about all of this? When is it the appropriate time to actually panic?"

"I-I don't know," She shakes her head, Gus just continuing.

"We have no idea where your dads are or where my dad is or where Amity's siblings are or if any of them are ok or alive or anything and we're just sitting here doing a puzzle it feels so- I don't know, so stupid," He stresses, Willow seeing his eyes begin to glow a dim blue. She immediately knows what to do, though, calmly instructing him.

"Count with me, Gus, it'll be ok," She assures him, beginning to count up on her fingers and take a deep breath in. Gus isn't too lost in his head, following after her breathing right away. He calms down pretty quickly, letting out a sigh after she stops counting.

"How are you so ok , Willow?" He asks, "How are you not falling apart?"

"I am, I don't think I've slept this little in my whole life," She admits, "It's just, I don't know, I agree with you. It never feels like the right time to talk about it."

"I don't even want to be sad about it, I just want to, you know, talk it out. It's so weird and lonely not talking about anything anymore, I guess the Human Realm burnt us out of that,"

Gus replies, “I get it’s not fun to talk. I just hate keeping secrets and stuff and that feels like all we’re doing right now, right?”

“I agree with you, I wish things weren’t the way they are but maybe we just need some more time to settle in,” Willow shrugs, “I mean, it’s gonna have to happen eventually, something is going to give.”

“I hope so,” Gus pauses a second before asking, “Do you ever, you know, think about how we got here? Do you ever think about how crazy everything that we’ve been through is?”

“Definitely, but I try not to. I mean, the other option was a lot worse,” Willow points out, “If we hadn’t been where we were at the time we were there and the Collector didn’t do what he did, things wouldn’t have been great.”

“Yeah, I try not to think about that,” Gus answers sadly, “But also it makes me kind of appreciate that we went through what we did because it ended up being good, right?”

“I guess so, when you look at it like that,” Willow nods, “But it makes me feel like so much stuff is just up to fate and chance, none of us knew that what we did would’ve caused us to save the Isles or anything. We just thought we were, I don’t know, going to save Luz. Thinking about Luz in general is crazy, like the coincidence that she came when she did is so weird.”

“Isn’t there a magic concept like that? Hunter was telling me about it a while ago for some reason, magic, uh, magic something. Where the Isles knows what it needs to sustain itself so the magic of the Isles influences people to do things? Have you ever heard of that?” Gus asks, Willow shaking her head.

“No, maybe I’ll ask Hunter about it,” She answers, “But isn’t that just the Titan’s will stuff Belos used to talk about?”

“No, it’s the magic, not the Titan. He’s, you know, dead, so he can’t talk, but his magic still has intention and all that,” Gus explains, “At least I think that’s how it works, Hunter would know more.”

“That’s cool, though, if that’s real. It at least brings a little security,” She replies, Gus nodding.

“Yeah, it’s cool to think there’s something looking out for us, even if it isn’t the actual Titan. Although, I wouldn’t want that guy near anything after all the stuff we were told he wanted,” Gus jokes, Willow chuckling.

“Do you ever think about why Belos had nothing better to do with his time than manipulate an island of witches doing nothing wrong?” Willow asks.

“Oh, all the time, I don’t think I’ll ever understand why he did it. I mean, nothing is worth this much dedication,” Gus leans back on his hands, moving his legs to be criss-crossed in front of him rather than pulled up to his chest, “I mean, what could witches have possibly done to the guy?”

“Regardless of what they did, it wouldn’t have been the entirety of the Isles, right? I think he took some liberties with the blame,” Willow reasons, “It had something to do with his brother, didn’t it?”

“But his brother was in love with the one witch, how did that cause him to want to wipe everyone on the Isles out?” Gus questions, “Maybe it makes sense but the Wittebane story has always been confusing to me.”

“Me too, Hunter and Luz always talk about it like it’s some sort of code. I guess I don’t really want to know, though, so it’s ok,” She agrees, “It’s just really crazy to think about how everything is linked.”

“I know, right? Who knew that Philip and Luz and Caleb and Hunter and everything was all connected?” Gus marvels, Willow looking at him confused.

“How do you know that?”

“Know what?”

“About Caleb and Hunter?” She puzzles, pretty sure Hunter never told Gus that he was modeled after Caleb. He barely told her that, and she doesn’t know when he would’ve worked up the courage to tell Gus too.

“When I looked into Belos’ mind, on the Day of Unity. I saw, well, everything. All of the stuff with Belos and Caleb and the witch Caleb fell in love with and how Belos has been making Grimwalkers of him forever. I knew all of that, yeah,” Gus shrugs, “It still doesn’t make a lot of sense, I mean it went by really fast and a lot happened that day but I knew the thing about Hunter and Caleb.”

“Does- Does Hunter know you know that?” She asks, Gus nodding.

“Yeah, he does- Well, he didn’t, but he does now,” Gus tells her, “We got talking about it when we were looking in the closet for some reason on like, Sunday maybe? Yeah, on Sunday, I don’t know how we got to the topic but I said something and he asked how I knew it and I told him, he seemed fine with it.”

“Oh, well, not the weirdest thing I’ve heard I guess,” She answers, “Hunter just told me, in case you were wondering how I knew. It was like, the day after we found out he was a Grimwalker. Well, not you, apparently, and you didn’t tell me.”

“You wouldn’t have wanted me to!” Gus argues, laughing, “Miss don’t-tell-people’s-secrets!”

“Ok, yeah, I wouldn’t have, you’re right,” She laughs, “It’s just crazy you knew that already! And it’s crazy you can do that, since when have you been able to tap into people’s mind’s on command?”

“It’s not really on command, it just happens more than anything,” Gus dismisses, “But I did it with Adrian by accident, at Hexide, and I guess that’s when I figured out I could do it at all.”

“You drove him crazy doing that, that guy had to be carried out and you still told me you ‘didn’t do that much’.”

“I didn’t! I just freaked out, the driving him to insanity part was involuntary,” Gus counters, “I tried to do it again when Hunter was living with me but I couldn’t figure it out, all I could make Hunter see were things that had just happened to him, nothing deeper than that. I don’t know how I did it again!”

“Intention, probably, I don’t think you wanted to drive Hunter insane,” Willow reasons.

Gus nods, “Yeah, that, and also it’s just weird. I think maybe I shouldn’t be doing that as much as I want to because I also have to see all that stuff which, well, normally isn’t the best.”

“There’s gotta be a way where you don't, right?”

“Hmm, maybe, I haven’t tried enough to know,” Gus answers, Willow smiling.

“You’re so powerful, Gus, it’s crazy,” She gushes, Gus smiling and waving his hand to playfully wave her off.

“Aww, sweet coming from you, Willow, when you almost annihilated Kikimora at the Blight’s workshop, that was the scariest thing I’ve ever seen!” Gus tells her, “All to save who you thought was your precious-”

“Gus!” She cuts him off, covering her face for a second before looking up and telling him, “Keep teasing me and I’ll bring up-”

“No, no, don’t even say his name,” Gus stops her, sitting up straight and staring at her with the straightest face he can muster, although the corners of his mouth are clearly turned up.

“I will! I’ll do it!” She teases, Gus laughing and shaking his head.

“No! I don’t have any kind of crush or anything on him! We’re barely friends!”

“Yeah, I’ll be sure to consider that next time you can’t hang out because you have your little Sunday lunch dates.”

“Like you ever used to be able to put your scroll down when he was texting you.”

“Like you could talk about anything but Mat-”

They both look over at the door when it creaks open, Hunter standing in the doorway, looking at the two of them surprised. “Sorry, did I interrupt something?” He apologizes, Willow just laughing.

“No, no, Gus and I were just talking, you’re ok,” She assures him, smiling, “What were you doing downstairs?”

“Oh, uh, something was wrong with Flapjack, Mr. Clawthorne had to give him some kind of potion bath,” Hunter explains, Willow moving over on Gus’ bed and patting the free spot next to her.

“Come over here, come sit,” She invites him, Hunter walking over and sitting down on the edge of Gus’ bed, Flapjack sitting in one of his hands asleep.

Gus asks first, “So what’s up with Flapjack?”

“Mr. Clawthorne said Flapjack has been giving his strength to me instead of using it to heal himself, and last night just took a big toll on him. Eda and Luz helped make him a replenishing potion and he had to sit in it for ten minutes. And then after that I helped Raine and Luz clean up the kitchen and we sat and talked for a while, not about anything just hanging out, and then I came up here, yeah, that’s it,” Hunter shrugs.

“Oh, is Flapjack ok?” Gus asks, Hunter nodding.

“Yeah, he’s gonna be fine, I just have to make sure I take it easy so he doesn’t get any more hurt,” Hunter tells them, “Other than that, though, he’s ok.”

“And you’re ok, too?” Willow asks, Hunter nodding again.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m ok, I’m fine,” Hunter quickly assures her.

“Good,” She smiles, yawning before telling him, “Gus and I were just finishing up getting ready for bed, it’s not that late but we wanted some time to wind down before we try and get some sleep. Is that ok?”

“Yeah, yeah, that sounds good,” He affirms, “I’m going to go get ready, then, do you mind watching Flapjack?”

“Yeah, I can take him,” Willow carefully takes Flapjack from Hunter’s hand, setting him into hers. He stays asleep, Hunter telling her.

“The book Mr. Clawthorne lent Eda to brew with said he is probably going to sleep a lot tonight,” Hunter says as he gets up.

“It’s weird to hear him this quiet,” She answers, Hunter chuckling.

“Yeah, it’s a little off putting,” He agrees, “I’ll be quiet when I come back in case you guys are sleeping.”

“We won’t be, don’t worry,” She assures him, Hunter just nodding and walking back to the door and out of the room. When the door shuts behind him, Willow looks back at Gus and sighs, “Why can’t things just be normal for one day?”

“I don’t know, maybe one day we’ll get a break from it,” He rubs his eye with the hand that he’s not resting on behind him, “I’m so tired but I don’t think I’m going to sleep at all.”

“You should at least try,” Willow suggests, Gus raising an eyebrow at her.

“Says you.”

“I’m gonna try too,” Willow assures him, “I don’t think I will either though if I’m honest.”

“I guess it’s worth a try, though,” He shrugs, yawning again. Willow gets up from his bed, deciding that it’s probably good for them to wind down for a bit longer today if they’re hoping to get some sleep.

“Alright, I’m going to go just sit and relax for a bit if that’s ok, maybe try to wind down enough to sleep,” Willow says.

“Mhm, yeah, of course. Thank you for talking to me, Willow,” He smiles.

“Of course, you know I’m always up to talk,” She returns the smile, walking back over to her bed, sitting down, and setting Flapjack in her lap. She picks up her book on wild plant magic she found in one of Eda’s many piles of stuff, opening it up to where she left off. It’s a pretty interesting book, filled with a lot of information but also told in a story-like way that keeps her at least somewhat interested. Anything seems better than sleeping at night, though, so she could read the most boring book on the planet and be interested in it. Gus picks up his own thing, which she thinks is some weird human puzzle involving finding words or something, and the two of them just sit in silence together. She tries her best to take deep breaths as she reads and just immerse herself in something other than the uncertainty of the life she’s currently living, but it barely works. She can’t focus well at all on what she’s doing and she can’t stop thinking about how long tonight is going to be. She knows she won’t sleep, she never does. No matter what she tries she can’t get her body to just give up and sleep more than a couple of hours. She hopes that Gus doesn’t have that same problem tonight, especially considering he was up with her all of last night after Hunter left. Ideally, all three of them get a great night’s rest and wake up well-rested.

Realistically, she’ll be satisfied if, between all three of them, they get a few hours, if any at all.

Meet Me In the Woods
bethanyisinjail
Chapter 13: Boo!
Notes:
this chapter is so short but i wanted to put the thing at the end in its own chapter so didn't feel pressed for space so i just cut my losses and made this one a bit shorter. sorry!!!!

Chapter Text

Willow flips onto her back and sighs, silently begging whatever is in her brain that is keeping her from getting any sleep to just shut up for more than a few minutes. She looks over at Gus to see if he's faring any better with getting some rest, but she only sees the dim, soft illusion of human rain falling above his head, Gus staring up at it blankly. He clearly has had just as long of a night as she's had, Willow frowning at the sight. She rolls onto her side so she's facing Gus, watching the rain fall over him. It's somewhat calming, she admits, but it's not helping the night go by any faster.

After what is probably about five minutes, Gus looks over at her, giving her a weak smile when he sees she's awake. Willow returns it, Gus looking over at Hunter and looking back at Willow puzzled, silently asking if she knows he's awake. Willow just shrugs, sitting up a bit to look at Hunter. He's laying completely still, facing the wall with Flapjack on the bed beside him. She can't tell if he's breathing or not, or how well he's breathing, and he isn't making a sound. Gus sits up too, both of them looking at one another a bit concerned. Logically, he's fine, they know he's fine because he's just laying there still and clearly isn't dead, but it doesn't stop the immediate anxiety that kicks up in her chest. Gus must've had the same feeling, too, because, after a glance at Willow, he gets up, going across the room quietly and trying to peek over the top of Hunter to see if he's ok. Gus is too short, though, and even on his tiptoes, he can't see over Hunter. He reaches out a hand, and before Willow can stop him he places it down on Hunter.

The moment he puts a hand down on Hunter's shoulder Hunter turns and sits straight up. Gus must not have expected it because he falls backward and screams in terror, Hunter immediately jumping up to his feet. He immidiatley starts stumbling back and forth, though, Willow jumping up out of her bed to rush over to wrap an arm around him to steady him, Hunter leaning against her as he gets his bearings.

The door opens right as she gets over to Hunter, Willow looking up to see Amity and Luz standing in the doorway, Luz with a fanny pack of glyphs in her hand and Amity holding her staff. Raine appears right behind them a second later, being the first one to break the silence.

"Hey, what's going on here guys? Who was screaming?"

"Sorry, sorry," Gus apologizes and he gets back up, "Hunter just startled me."

"Ok," Raine slowly answers, clearly not buying it that much. They look over to their right as Camila walks up next to them, putting a hand on her daughter's shoulder.

"Is everything alright?" She asks, looking between them in the room and Raine.

"Yeah, everything is ok, sorry Camila," Gus apologizes again, very shameful. Hunter breaks away from Willow to sit down on the bed, Raine getting by Amity and Luz to come into the room and walk up to Hunter.

"Are you ok, kiddo? Why do you look so pale?"

“I just got up too fast, I’m ok,” Hunter assures them, all of them looking over when a new voice joins the group.

“What is all of this commotion in here?” They ask, Willow seeing Lilith walk around Camila to stand where Raine was before. Willow almost forgot Lilith was living here considering how little she comes out of her room, but apparently, this was warranting of a venture out.

“Nothing, Gus just got startled,” Raine tells Lilith, who hums.

“Mmm, good enough for me,” She shrugs, walking off probably to go back into her room. Raine looks back at Hunter.

“You’re sure you’re ok?” Raine checks, Hunter nodding.

“Mhm, yeah, I’m sure,” He assures them, Raine smiling.

“Ok, and you guys are, too?” Raine looks between Gus and Willow, Willow looking at Gus nodding first before affirming.

“Yeah, we’re ok, sorry,” Willow apologizes.

“It’s ok, I just want to make sure you guys are ok,” They assure them walking towards the door and saying something to Camila, Amity, and Luz that Willow doesn’t hear. They all walk off after, though, Willow guessing Raine told them to go back to bed. Raine turns around in the doorway, looking between Hunter, Willow, and Gus and telling them, “Do you guys need anything else before I go back to bed?”

“No, we’re ok,” Gus answers, “Sorry.”

“It’s ok, really,” They smile, “Try and get some sleep, it’s late. Come and find me if you need anything, ok?”

“Mhm, thank you, Raine,” Willow answers, Raine just shutting the door. Gus doesn’t even look at either of them, just walking back over to his bed and lying down under the covers. Hunter and Willow glance at each other concerned. Willow is really unsure of what to do. Everything happened so fast, one minute she was laying in bed and the next Gus just woke up everyone on the second floor of the Owl House except for Eda. Willow looks back at Hunter, who is still staring over at Gus intently.

“Are you ok?” She asks, kind of hesitantly. She’s not sure if that’s the right thing to say right now but she needs something to break the awkward, tense silence in the room. Hunter’s head snaps over in surprise, nodding.

“Mhm, yeah, I’m fine,” He replies. Willow nods, awkwardly standing there a second before taking a couple of steps back, turning around and walking over to sit on her bed. She looks up, though, when she hears sniffling coming from the corner of the room, looking first at Gus and then at Hunter, who has moved back to sit against the headboard of his bed. Willow

almost goes to say something, but Hunter beats her to it. “Hey Gus,” Hunter calls over to the corner of the room, Gus looking back over his shoulder and sitting up, the tears on his cheeks shining from the dim moonlight in the room. Hunter beckons him over, “Come here.”

Gus hesitates a second but gets up, walking over to sit down on the edge of Hunter’s bed, a bit far from him, facing away from Willow. Immediately, he apologizes, “Sorry for waking you up.”

“I wasn’t sleeping,” Hunter tells him, “And I’m sorry for sitting up like that, I scared you. It’s my fault.”

“No, I screamed, I screamed and woke everyone up,” Gus replies tearfully, “I’m sorry.”

“It’s ok, you just got startled, it happens,” Hunter reassures him, “You were trying to look out for me, I appreciate it, thank you.”

“I made everyone nervous and worried and woke them all up over nothing . That’s so embarrassing,” Gus’ shoulders shake as he starts to hiccup, Hunter opening up his arms to him. Gus moves forward and lets Hunter pull him into a hug, Gus just curling up into Hunter’s arms.

“I don’t find it embarrassing at all, it’s not embarrassing to get scared, especially if you were worried about me in the first place. And even if it was, it’ll pass, everyone will be ok and I guarantee no one is going to bring it up again,” Hunter assures him. Willow barely hears Gus’ tearful response he says into Hunter’s chest.

“But what if they do? What if Amity and Luz are annoyed that I woke them up and they’re talking about me and they think I’m stupid and I can’t just think and grow up-”

“Then I’ll have to deal with them, if they’re talking bad about you,” Hunter proudly assures him, Willow hearing Gus wetly chuckle a bit. Hunter’s voice drops more calm as he continues, “And Amity and Luz would never talk about you like that, either, they both understand how scary nighttime gets. Did you know Luz insisted on having a hand on me at all times while she was sleeping for the first two weeks we were in the Human Realm? She couldn’t sleep without it, if I got up and left she’d just lay there until I came back. Sometimes weird things make you feel comfortable, there’s nothing wrong with that.”

“But I screamed! For no reason,” Gus’ shoulders shake with sobs, Hunter pulling him a little bit closer and rubbing his back. Hunter strangely doesn’t say anything, just letting Gus lay against him and cry, and all Hunter does is just rub his back and keep his arms firmly around him. Gus just moves in closer, though, clearly indicating what Hunter is doing is helping. Willow smiles encouragingly when Hunter looks up at her, happy that Hunter and Gus are so close. It’s just nice that two of the most important people to her are also just as important to each other. Sometimes she’s worried that they’re going to start hanging out with each other more than they want to hang out with her, but she knows that’s silly. They can all care about each other equally, there doesn’t have to be a completion.

Gus' crying calms down after a bit, and once he's silent for a solid few minutes Hunter looks down at him, pushing him back a bit and smiling. Willow looks at him confused, Hunter looking up at her and mouthing, "He's sleeping."

She chuckles, returning the smile at the thought of Gus getting some sleep. It brings her a little bit of relief, too, knowing that he's not also awake. Hunter leans back against the headboard slowly, stopping when Gus moves a bit to turn to the side so he's fully curled into Hunter's side. Hunter takes one hand and holds it down beside him, picking it back up with Flapjack on top of it to set on top of his leg. He returns to wrap the arm around Gus again, laying back a bit more comfortably. Hunter's eyes stay fixed on Gus, but Willow still feels awkward just staring at him. Although she's way too worked up to sleep, she lays down anyway, getting back under the covers and pulling them up to her neck, just staring at the wall. Her eyes won't stay closed at all but she tried to convince herself that it's almost morning, she'll just lay here for a little bit longer and it'll be morning.

It takes forever but she finally starts to drift off to sleep, only startled back awake by the image flashing in her mind of Hunter laying in her lap not breathing, the same thing that's been haunting her since she got back. She, on instinct, sits straight up and looks at him, Hunter's eyes widening in surprise when she does. She lets out a sigh of relief to see him sitting just like before, holding Gus and leaning back against his headboard. He takes one hand and waves at her, Willow waving back. Hunter furrows his brow at her, mouthing, "Are you ok?"

Willow nods, looking down into her lap and fiddling with her hands, at a loss for what to do now. She knows Hunter and Gus are ok but her heart is still pounding. She sees Hunter looking at her still worried, though, and she really doesn't want him to be concerned about her. So, despite how much she really doesn't want to, she lays back down and tries to fall asleep again, hoping maybe this time the memory won't worm its way back into the forefront of her mind.

She just wants it to be morning already.

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Sunlight peeks through the curtain covering up the big window in Raine's room, Raine drifting awake to feel Eda laying on top of them, Raine's arms wrapped around her and Eda's stump placed on top of their chest so it doesn't get irritated. They're not sure when they ended up like this last night, but Raine vaguely remembers coming back in from checking on Gus, Hunter, and Willow to a very grumpy Eda complaining about how they were gone forever . Raine was surprised that she woke up at all, not to mention how she complained about them not being there. They didn't think she cared about sleeping in the same bed with them that much, but she's been grumpy recently, so maybe it just bled into her sleepy self too. They just smile at her, though, because to them, it doesn't matter why she wanted to be held, wanting it at all is good enough for Raine.

They don’t lay there for very long, though, knowing that the kids probably didn’t go back to bed after the little scare last night. Luz and Amity were still up and talking when Raine went back to bed, and Willow, Gus, and Hunter, as exhausted as they looked, were also very on edge when Raine left them. So they figure they should get started on breakfast now, give the kids a reprieve from probably just hiding in their rooms until morning like Hunter did when he was in Raine and Eda’s room.

Although, the moment they try to pull away, Eda tugs at their shirt with her left arm that’s at her side. “Mmm, no,” She whines, “Stay here.”

“Good morning to you too,” Raine greets, chuckling, “Sorry for waking you up last night.”

“Stay in bed for longer, make it up to me,” She looks up at them, drowsily smiling.

“I need to get started on breakfast, all of the kids are probably up by now,” They tell her, “We have the curtain drawn, it’s probably late.”

“They’ll live, they ate yesterday,” She mumbles, curling in closer, “5 more minutes.”

“You have no way to tell what 5 more minutes is,” Raine points out, “We’ll be here forever.”

Eda groans, “Ugh, fine, I’ll get up.”

“No, I got it, stay in bed,” They assure her, Eda pushing herself to sit upright, Raine doing the same.

“I’ll come with you, I’m up,” She yawns, “At least for now I am.”

“You can come back to bed if you want to, but I’d love the company,” They smile, Eda looking back at them and returning it. Her smile is sleepy yet very genuine and sweet, Raine happy to see her at least a little bit brighter this morning than she was yesterday when she woke up looking half dead already.

“I’ll come with you if you tell me what had you flying out of bed last night,” She reasons, Raine nodding.

“Alright, consider it a deal,” They affirm, getting up and out of bed. They walk around the bed to offer Eda a hand too, pulling her up to her feet. She relies on them a decent amount but definitely looks like she’s feeling better than yesterday. She doesn’t waver at all standing up and looks a lot more alert, Raine smiling at her before starting their way out of the room and down the stairs. Eda follows behind them as they go into the kitchen, Raine beginning to take things out for breakfast. Eda tries to help, starting to take out the pans they need, but Raine shoos her away.

“Don’t start your day straining yourself, I got it,” They assure her, “Take it easy this morning.”

“I can take it,” She nudges them, “But I’ll only listen to you because I’m feeling better this morning and I don’t want to risk that.”

“Thank you,” They smile at her, Eda sticking her tongue out at them. They do it back and Eda laughs before she walks over to sit at the table, her back leaning on it so she’s facing out.

“Wow, you guys cleaned up nice in here last night,” She comments as Raine pulls out a couple of things from the refrigerator.

“Most of this was Luz and Hunter, they were talking to one another and tidying up. They’re so funny, those two, they get along so much better than you’d think they would,” Raine remarks.

“Right? I was thinking that yesterday, she made him into her big brother,” She chuckles.

“She was doing a good job keeping him calm at the table, too, he was really panicked about it when he was sitting in the living room with me and I was worried it was going to boil over when your dad was handling Flapjack but it was like her presence calmed him,” Raine adds, “I think hearing them talk almost killed me, though, they’re in each other’s brains. They just go from topic to topic like it’s nothing, one minute they were seriously discussing how Hunter was worried about Flapjack’s recovery, and the next they had moved onto the human concept of ‘middle names’. I think fate brought the two of them together.”

“That or trauma, the council is still out on which,” Eda jokes, Raine laughing. “Granted, she told me that the two of them worked together in Latissa, so maybe a bit of both.”

“They’re so interesting, those two,” Raine says, a beat of silence going by before Eda asks.

“So, are you going to tell me what happened last night?”

“Oh, yeah,” They nod as they start cracking the griffin eggs into the mixing bowl, “So, like, I don’t even know how late last night, I heard Gus scream down the hall. Obviously, I got up to go check, and by the time I got there Amity and Luz were standing in the doorway, both of them looked ready to fight which was a little saddening, but when I looked in they all looked fine. Gus told me that Hunter startled him, I didn’t press him on how, but it also ended up waking up Camila and your sister. He was embarrassed, I could tell, but I checked on all of them and everyone was fine. Hunter jumped out of bed, I think, he looked faint but he said he just stood up too quickly. They didn’t get us after that so I’m figuring everything was fine, but it was really weird. They all looked exhausted too, Especially Willow and Gus. I don’t think they were sleeping before whatever happened.”

“Mmm, I don’t think they’re sleeping with Hunter in there, I think Willow and Gus are too nervous that something is going to happen. I called this when the group of them got here, I told you that first morning that if something happened to him none of the kids would ever sleep,” Eda reminds them, “And guess what I was?”

“You were right, I know, but I never said you were wrong,” Raine counters. They pause a second, contemplating the first solution that comes to their mind before offering it, “I mean, do you think it would be better for him to have his own room? Or maybe stay in ours?”

“I was just going to suggest he stay in our room instead,” Eda concurs, “His own room is risky, if something happens to him there’s no one around to help, plus would you want to be alone after everything he’s been through? He’d definitely be more comfortable with other people, and I think putting him with the kids is cruel because no matter what they’re gonna feel responsible and he’s gonna feel bad they have to look after him. Maybe we’ll offer sometime later today to him, see if he’d be ok with it too.”

“Mhm, yeah, I think that’s a good plan. Hopefully we find out what’s wrong with him and him being unable to breathe won’t be a constant worry,” Raine sighs, Eda humming in affirmation.

“Yeah, me too, but we’ll deal with it while it’s a problem, I guess,” She agrees, Raine looking over when someone comes down the stairs. They watch Luz and Amity walk into the room, Raine smiling at them.

“Good morning, I’m working on breakfast, it’ll be ready in a bit,” They tell the two kids, both nodding.

“Mhm, thank you, Raine,” Luz answers, the two walking back towards the table. Raine looks back to see Eda greet them, getting up to let them sit down where she was. Eda walks over to stand next to Raine on their left. They look over at her and smile, Eda wrapping her arm around their waist, putting her weight on them.

“Hey,” They quietly greet her, “You can go back to bed.”

“No, no, I’m not tired, just, you know, tired,” She answers, Raine shaking their head.

“No, I don’t know, I have no idea, actually,” They reply, Eda just quietly laughing. Raine can’t help but smile at how clingy she is, but they just go back to finishing breakfast. They’re genuinely impressed with themselves that they manage not to burn anything witha tray in the oven, two pans, and a pot simmering on the stove.

As things finish they set them out on the other counter, Eda breaking away from them to set out silverware on the table for the kids. Right as they’re turning off the stove they look up to see Gus walking in, followed closely by Hunter and then Willow. Raine looks back and smiles at them, “Good morning, I’m finishing up breakfast, I’ll bring it to the table.”

The kids all just hum, going over to sit down at the table, Raine notes that, oddly, Gus sits between Hunter and Willow, when he normally sits across from them and next to Amity. It’s weird, but last night was rough, so Raine just figures that Gus is finding comfort sitting with Hunter and Willow. Eda brings over plates to Raine, carrying a stack of them over with one hand holding them, also resting them on her stump to keep her from dropping it.

“Is that arm feeling ok today?” Raine asks, more curious than anything. Eda sets the plates on the counter before she shrugs.

“It’s better, but it’s not great. It can touch things without feeling like someone set it on fire, though, which is an improvement,” She tells them, “Do you want help plating everything?”

“No, I got it,” They tell her as they start to portion out everything, careful to only put eggs and skhog meat on Luz’s plate, looking over at Eda. “We need to get some more stuff for her.”

“I know, when I get my hand back I’ll go, we need more griffin eggs anyway,” She says as she picks up Luz’s plate, bringing it over to her. She comes back and grabs the other finished plate Raine makes, bringing that to Amity. Raine finishes up the last three and has Eda grab one, Raine taking the other two and handing them across the table to Hunter and Gus. They all just give their quiet thank yous, beginning to quietly poke at their food. Raine and Eda go back over to the counter, but barely begin plating their food before someone comes rushing down the hallway, both of them turn back to see Darius standing just inside the doorway, looking at them wide-eyed and almost stunned. They both look at one another before walking over to him, Eda asking, “Why do you look like you’ve seen a ghost?”

“Uh, well, maybe you could say that,” He nervously laughs, “Osran spotted a whole collection of dead and broken palismen just off the path south of here, he said it looked like it was leading down towards the bay on the other coast. As much as that’s not towards us it’s definitely not far, we need to sit down and have a meeting, now, I’m not pushing it off anymore.”

Raine looks over at Eda in shock, seeing she’s looking over at the kids at the table, Raine following her gaze to see every single one of them sitting completely still, looking over at Darius in horror. Hunter and Luz look like they’re about to pass out, Darius following where they’re looking and immediately correcting himself.

“After breakfast,” He says, “I’m going to have Mason help set up more chairs and make the table longer in the basement, just- come in when you’re ready.”

“Ok, yeah,” Eda nods, clearly stunned by the story, “Yeah, fine, tell Lily on your way back to the tower, please.”

“Yeah, yeah, I will,” He affirms, walking back off. Raine and Eda just stare at one another for a very long moment, both clearly processing the information they were just told. Belos is close . He’s not just on the Isles, he’s on the upper right arm, he’s right by where they’re living, and he’s trying to get stronger. Their attention is drawn away, though, when they hear Luz quietly tell her friends.

“We should probably go,” She goes to get up, but Eda jumps to stop them.

“Eat some breakfast first, guys, Darius still needs to have the chairs set up downstairs and nothing is going to happen right now,” She assures them, “We’ll go down in a bit, not yet.”

Amity, Willow, and Gus all just look back at their plate right away, Luz stares at her for a second before nodding and looking back down at her plate in front of her. Hunter stays looking up at Eda and Raine, though, but Eda just gives him a warm smile that makes him look down at his food, although his expression of pure fear doesn't fade. Eda turns back to look at Raine, her face twisted in a heartbreaking hopelessness that Raine has only seen a couple of times. They reassuringly smile at her the best they can, mouthing to her, "It'll be ok."

Eda sighs, rubbing her eyes and stepping forward and leaning her head against Raine's shoulder. They pull her into a hug, Eda very quietly telling them, "You don't know that."

Raine purses their lips but doesn't argue, knowing that she's absolutely right, they don't know if it's going to be ok. They could probably reason with her that if it isn't they can deal with it, but not isn't the time. The tenseness in the room is almost suffocating, and they don't need to make more of it trying to debate semantics with her.

Eda steps back when they hear footsteps coming down the hallway, Lilith walking into the room, clearly just having woken up, her hair tied back into a ponytail. She doesn't say anything, just staring intently at Eda. Raine looks between the two of them, immediately recognizing the way that they're staring at each other from when they used to silently communicate as kids, something that annoyed Raine to no end. Lilith just huffs and shakes her head, though, walking over to grab a seat next to Luz, Raine leaning against the counter so they can keep an eye on the kids as they poke around their food, Eda standing next to them. "Good morning, Luz," Lilith greets.

"Oh, hey Lilith," Luz sits up a bit more, "I feel like I've barely seen you since we got back, what have you been doing in your room?"

"Oh, you have to come and see, maybe later I can show you what I've been making. Things get so boring around here sometimes, I've gotten back into model making and it has just been so fun. Recently I've been taking the notes I gathered on the Stonesleepers last week and applying them to my models from the Hecktaceous period. I even made little mini us riding my Stonesleeper model," Lilith details to her, Raine very surprised to hear Luz genuinely laugh.

"I have to come see them, then. Are we in Deadwardian Era accurate attire?" She questions.

"Oh of course," Lilith answers. Luz chuckles again, pausing a second before commenting.

"Your hair is growing out a lot, I swear it was fully black two months ago."

"Oh, yes, my hair hated being dyed black, it's been growing back this fast since the day I started doing it," Lilith runs a hand down her ponytail, which is half black and half her old ginger color. It's also back to its old curls, which seem even more unruly than Eda's hair.

"How does that even work? Your hair grew back consciously?"

"Yes, that doesn't happen to you?"

“No?” Luz puzzles, “That’s some witch thing I don’t know about. But I like it, it looks nice.”

“Why thank you! I think so too,” She cheerfully answers, “How was your time in the Human Realm? See anything fun?’

Luz shrugs, “No, not really. It’s just Connecticut, nothing fun there.”

“What’s a Conn-edi-kit?” Lilith questions, Luz chuckling.

“It’s where I live,” She tells her, “It’s pretty boring, well, at least where I live is.”

“I’m sure I would find it very fun,” Lilith counters, glancing back before patting Luz’s shoulder and standing up, “I would love to hear about all of the boring things you did, though, maybe later?”

“Yeah, I’ll come talk to you later,” Luz nods, Lilith leaving the table and walking over to where Eda and Raine are standing. Luz doesn’t stay sitting long, either, getting up from the table and telling her friends, “I’m going down, I’m not hungry.”

“Me too,” Hunter agrees, he and the rest of the kids getting up from the table, Eda sighing but bumping Raine.

“Go with them,” She whispers to them, Raine nodding.

“I’ll come with you guys, just leave your dishes there, maybe you’ll want them later,” Raine tells them, “And we need to get your mom too, Luz.”

“I’ll grab her,” Luz says as she walks out of the room, Amity, Willow, and Gus following her. Hunter stops before the doorway, looking at Raine, Flapjack clasped in his shaking hands in the same way that he was when Hunter first came here. He just looks scared , Raine putting a hand on his back.

“Hey, it’ll be ok, ok? Take a deep breath, I’m sure this meeting will be quick, and I’ll be right there with you,” Raine assures him, Hunter nodding before listening to them and taking a deep breath in as he walks off down the hallway, Raine giving one more glance at Eda, who gives them a small nod of assurance that she appreciates Raine going down with the kids so she can talk to her sister. They return a smile, although they certainly don’t feel like smiling right now. This is all just terrifying, and they wish they weren’t an adult that had to keep calm because all they really want to do right now is panic. They know that they can’t, though, so they just plaster a calm, relaxed expression on and prepare themselves to face the horrible reality of their situation right now. It was nice living in ignorance, but it’s not going to keep them safe.

They wait at the bottom of the stairs as they hear the kids make their way to Camila’s room, all of them coming back downstairs a minute later, Luz leading them with her mom coming down last. The only exception is Hunter, who comes down a couple of seconds after the group, slowly making his way down the stairs as everyone else goes down into the

basement. Raine furrows their brow at Hunter, asking after he gets to the bottom, “Are you ok, Hunter?”

Hunter looks up at them in shock, seemingly caught off guard by them talking to him. He’s clearly on the cusp of panic, it’s written all over his face.

“Hey, sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you. I just wanted to make sure you’re doing ok,” Raine apologizes, Hunter just standing there and staring at them. They’re not really sure what they can do to help, so they decide to try just asking.“What can I do to help you out? Do you want to talk about it? Just go downstairs? A distraction? A hug? I’m here to help, just point me in the right direction.”

Hunter looks down at his hands for a second, Flapjack tweeting something at him. Raine just stands there patiently, waiting to see if he’s going to answer or just walk away or completely break down. They only wait a second before Hunter very quietly mutters to them, “Hug.”

“Ok, I-”

“But I don’t want to let go of Flapjack,” He hurriedly admits, Raine just smiling.

“Ok, I can make that happen too,” Raine beckons him closer, not wanting to be the one to close the gap. Hunter just stands there stiff, Raine wrapping their arms around him and letting him rest his head on their shoulder. He keeps Flapjack in his hands, although Raine doesn’t mind. If it’s bringing him comfort, that makes Raine happy.

They don’t stay for long, though, hearing Eda and Lilith talking in the kitchen and not wanting to accidentally eavesdrop on their conversation. Instead, they step back after a minute, looking at Hunter and sadly smiling when they see disappointment flash across his face. “I’m sorry, we need to get downstairs. After, ok?”

“No, it’s ok, I’m sorry,” Hunter apologizes, walking off down the hall. Raine sighs, cursing at themselves for doing that.

“Hunter, hey,” Raine stops him, Hunter stopping but not turning back. “You don’t need to be sorry, thank you for telling me what you needed. You’re ok for asking that, it’s not weird or anything, ok?”

Hunter nods, looking back at them for a second before just saying, “Thank you.”

“Of course, kiddo,” Raine reaches up and rubs his shoulder, Hunter jumps and looks down at the hand. Raine immediately draws it back, definitely forgetting to consider the history of that move. Hunter just stares down at the spot where Ranie’s hand just was, Raine feeling guilt settle in their chest. “Sorry,” They apologize.

Hunter looks back up at them, expressing something unreadable, taking a shaky breath before barely mumbling, “Not your fault.”

“We can talk about it after, ok?” Raine offers, Hunter nodding before continuing downstairs, Raine following after him. They go down into the basement to see the kids and Camila already sitting at the table, a few of the coven heads also already sitting at the other end. Unfortunately for Raine, Terra is already down here, and the way that she looks back and smiles at them makes their skin crawl. They follow behind Hunter to the far side of the table, where there are two free chairs next to Gus. Hunter sits down next to him, Raine sitting between Hunter and the head of the table, where Eda is probably going to sit. Camila is across from them, and she smiles at them when they sit down. They try their best to return it, but they can feel Terra’s eyes on them. Out of the corner of their eye, they see Hunter subtly look over at her and then at Raine. Hunter doesn’t say anything, though, just sitting up a bit straighter.

No one says anything, Raine doing their best to keep their eyes straightforward. They just got down here and they already feel so overstimulated, resisting every urge to cover their ears to try to get the room to just be silent. The scuff of Amity’s chair when she moves it closer to Luz and the tapping of Adrian’s fingers on the far end of the table and the quiet sighing of Luz sounds so unbelievably loud to them. They just sit there completely still anyway, knowing there will be a time to do all of the panicking and earplugging that they want to do, but now is not that time. This meeting can’t go that bad, all they’re going to do is just talk about Belos and the Collector and be done with it. It’ll be over in no time.

As long as they don’t make eye contact with Terra they’ll be ok, they can hold themself together.

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Eda waits until she hears all of the kids start to go upstairs before she turns back to her sister standing in front of her, Lilith beating her to saying anything.

“Did Darius come in here and tell you everything about Belos in front of all of the kids?” Lilith questions, Eda sighing and nodding.

“Yeah, I’m not happy about that at all, he has no sense for other people, apparently. If he had thought about it for five seconds maybe some of them would have eaten something,” She complains, “I understand he’s stressed but I think he scared Hunter and Luz so badly they shut down, the two looked completely glazed over.”

“Luz looked really pale when I sat next to her, I was worried,” Lilith adds, “I can’t imagine that was easy for any of them to hear.”

“Yeah, no kidding, and now they’re gonna have to sit down and talk about it,” Eda crosses her arms, “I feel so bad for them, you know, they’re not all actually my kids but with the exception of Amity I’m the closest thing to a guardian they’ve got. I guess Raine too, but

Darius certainly isn't going to be playing as anyone's parent. He barely wants to admit he's going to end up fathering Amity."

"He's dating Alador again? Well, I knew that, but he admitted it?" Lilith questions, Eda nodding.

"He told me yesterday, well, I kind of made him tell me. He claimed they weren't together but he caved pretty quick. Apparently, the kids knew a couple of days ago, we're late to the party," Eda tells her.

Lilith chuckles, "No kidding, but it's not like they didn't make it glaringly obvious already."

"Still, would've been nice to be told," Eda answers, Lilith doing nothing more than returning a tight smile. They just sit in silence for a minute, the tenseness growing and growing until Eda just decides to jump the gun and talk about it. "Can you believe this, Lily?" She starts, feeling so defeated at the familiarity of this conversation, "Can you believe how deep all of this stuff goes?"

"No, I really can't. Everything is just, I don't know, so interconnected. The kids are intertwined with Belos who is linked to the Collector who is connected to the Titan who is related to King. Everything is just so, I don't know, big," Lilith agrees.

"Too big, and now it's not just Luz, it's all of the kids. And, Titan, they're kids Lily! The youngest of them is 13, they shouldn't be having to worry about anything more skipping their boring history classes but now they're in charge of helping us save the world or whatever, that shouldn't be what's on their mind," Eda rubs her face with her hand, feeling herself start to get worked up over a topic that always seems to hit a sensitive spot with her. "Not only that but I can't get Luz to talk to me for more than two minutes about anything serious so I have no idea if she's ok or not and no matter what I say to her she just evades the topic of how she's been doing with all of this. The kid barely spends any time with me anymore."

"She's got her friends around, I'm sure she hasn't just forgotten you," Lilith tries to assure her.

"I know, and I know they just got here and she's not obligated to spend time with me for her to care about her but she avoids it. She has her moments, we joke and it feels normal but then the next she's just looking at me like I'm some stranger. I mean, she has her real mom around, I guess it makes sense," Eda sighs, swallowing the lump in her throat.

Lilith's expression falls a bit more, "I mean, maybe she's just settling in."

"It doesn't make it hurt any less," Eda admits, Lilith just nodding. Eda shakes her head, "It's ok, it is what it is. She was never really my kid, I guess, right?"

"Not at all, Edalyn, you know you don't believe that," Lilith counters her, "It hurts because she was your kid, and she still is. She's just in a weird spot right now, she's got a lot on her plate. Give her some time to come to terms with it, she'll come back to you when she's ready."

“Mmm,” Eda hums, although so much of her doesn’t believe it. She’s not sure what sparked this feeling, if it was the way Luz barely greeted her this morning or the plethora of nightmares she’s been having about it, but she can’t help but feel anything but dread thinking about both her kids.

“Things will get better, you just need to let them,” Lilith tells her, but Eda doesn’t believe it.

“You don’t know that,” Eda stops her, “Especially after the scare this morning, we have no idea if things will ever be ok.”

“We knew this was coming,” Lilith tries to counter.

“We didn’t anticipate him finding any palismen,” Eda points out, “And this means that he isn’t being hunted by the Collector because we got no report of a Collector sighting from Darius,” Eda pushes back at tears as the horrible realization hits her, quietly adding, “And it’s been 28 days, Lily, 28 days since we’ve seen King.”

Lilith sighs, “I know he’s out there, Edalyn, he’s a smart kid, he’ll be ok. You raised him, I’m sure he can adapt just fine until we find a way to get him out of there.”

“It feels like we’re not getting any closer to that goal,” Eda admits, both her and Lilith looking over when Darius steps into the kitchen, beckoning the both of them.

“Come on, almost everyone is downstairs,” He tells them, “I just want to get this over with.”

Lilith looks at Eda for direction, Eda waving her off, “Go, I’ll be down in a second, ok?”

Lilith looks at her quizzically for a moment but just nods, going with Darius down the hallway. Eda hears her veer away halfway down the hallway to go get Hooty for the meeting, Darius complaining but not stopping her. Eda tunes out that interaction, though, stepping away from the doorway and over to the counter, leaning on it with one hand and trying to calm herself down. She takes a deep breath, a couple of tears slipping down her face on the shaky exhale. She knows this isn’t the time to cry, though, no matter how horribly hopeless she feels. They’re waiting for her downstairs, and she’s setting a horrible example if she shows up as a wreck. She wipes her face and stands up straight, shaking her head to try to shake off the bone-crushing thought of nothing being ok and her kid avoiding her and her other kid being under the control of some star god. It doesn’t work but that doesn’t matter, she needs to get going.

She turns around and heads down the hallway, ignoring how Hooty is stretched through the hallway and down the stairs. She reaches the basement to see almost everyone there with only 4 empty seats. One at one head of the table, which she assumes is hers, one between Amity and Eda’s dad, and two at the other end of the table. Eda takes her seat, looking down at the table at how everyone is sitting. There are three clear sections at the table, with the coven heads at one end, the other adults in the middle, and the kids closest to Eda. On the left, Raine is sitting closest to her, with Hunter after them, Gus between him and Willow, and Lilith sitting next to Hooty beside Willow. After her are Adrian, Vitimir, and Mason, all of which look extremely annoyed at having to be here. On her right is Camila, Luz next to her, then

Amity, and then an empty seat before Eda's parents. Terra, Hettie, and Osran sit next to them, Osran with a small table set up next to him, crystal balls both on the main table and on his little side table. Everyone at the table is dead quiet, giving the room a really eerie, doomsday feel to it.

A minute later, Eda looks over to see Eberwolf coming down the stairs, taking one of the seats at the opposite head of the table. After him is Darius, who sits at the head of the table, Alador behind him holding Eda's hand that he's been working on. It's not the whole thing, though, just the piece of metal that joins it to her arm and a little bit of the forearm. He doesn't say anything, just sitting at the last free spot at the table, setting his project down and continuing to work on it. Eda opens her mouth to ask him why he's doing that down here, but Darius stops her.

"Edalyn, don't," He threatens, Eda holding her hand up in surrender.

"I said nothing," She says, Darius sighing before looking at everyone and starting.

"Ok, so, I think we've all heard about what happened this morning…"